



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
HOUSE WAYS & MEANS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKER & FAMILY SUPPORT

*“Leveling the Playing Field for Working Families:  
Challenges and Opportunities”*

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PL+US

*paidleave.us*

Submitted by:  
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Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Walorski, and Members of the Subcommittee:

**PL+US: Paid Family Leave for the U.S** is a national advocacy organization fighting for paid family leave so that everyone can give and receive family care when it matters most.

As you examine the importance of leveling the playing field for working families, we urge you to take into consideration the voices of working people who need paid family leave. Below are quotes from some of the statements PL+US has collected from across the country.

### **Caregiving Leave**

*Listed alphabetically by state*

**Ike Wilder, Compton, CA** I usually balance my 9 to 5 job and work caregiving for my elderly parents. One has dementia and the other parent is partially blind with pacemaker. I have to use my vacation and sick time to care for them. Many times I put work first to have income for myself. My parents don't qualify for in home supportive services due to their income. This is a long journey that I've been going through for about 12 years.

**Jane Miller, Vienna, IL** I worked through most of my father dying from lung cancer. Then I worked long hours, way too much, for several years while my mom was in the nursing home with Alzheimer's. Next it was my 77 year old aunt, hit by a car, and then my sister, with multiple cancers. My work was very uncooperative about being gone for these instances, especially my aunt and sister, neither of which have children of their own to look out for them. Any paid leave bill needs to include provisions for those other than just children, spouses, and parents. Some people just don't have anyone else to be there for them. What are they supposed to do? What is a worker supposed to do when their loved one who is ill isn't on the list of "approved relatives"?

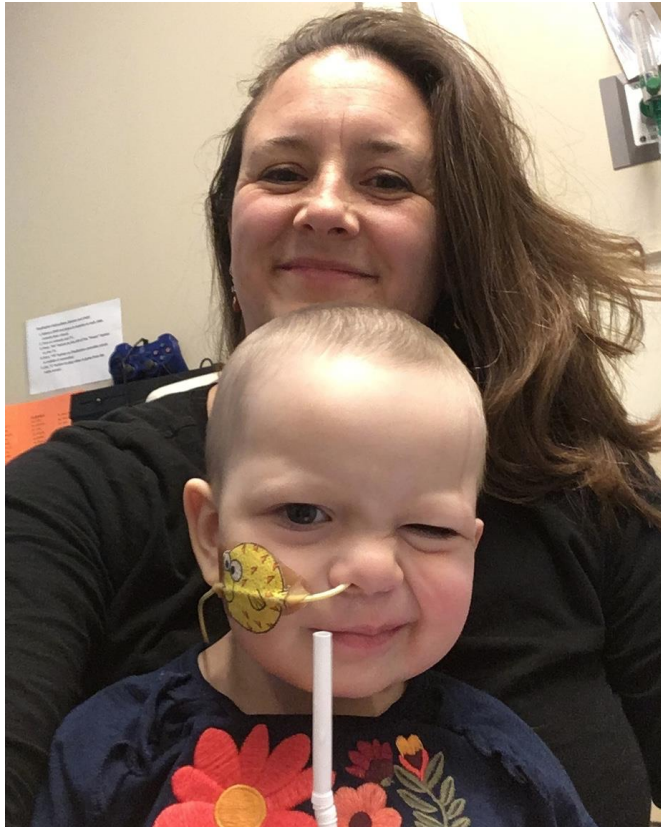
**Lea Hall, Holbrook, MA** When my father was dying I had to work with no time off to care for him. I also had to pay a stranger to care for him while I worked. So I had to work overtime to afford it. This was a job I'd been at for almost seven years. But no leave available.

**Sean Cleary, Mechanic Falls, ME** After my son was born, my wife was bedridden for days after a botched epidural. She was lucky enough to have me around to help out... but only because my employer has a generous vacation policy. Vacation, mind you, not family leave. We were lucky, but it shouldn't be a matter of luck whether a parent can get PTO to help his or her family member in a time of need, without worrying about bills piling up while pay's not coming in.

**Cathy Campbell-Olszewski, Houghton, MI** When our first child was born, she had a severe bleed in her brain and had to be sent to a hospital by ambulance a hundred miles away. My husband drove back and forth so he could be with us in Neonatal Unit since he had used up all his sick leave. We were in the hospital for 6 weeks before we could bring her home. We needed him with us as I stayed at a friend's house and walked to the hospital at 6am in the morning. We only had one car and he needed it to drive to work every day in Houghton, while my baby and I were in Marquette, Michigan. He would come every weekend and call several times a day. It was tough.

**Astrid Duarte, Cramerton, NC** Recently my elderly mother experienced a very traumatic fall in which her head was gashed open and pelvis broken. I fortunately am a privileged person whose spouse earns enough that I am free to care for my loved ones. I often wonder what I would have done otherwise.

**Eva Love, Las Vegas, NV** My husband had a really bad stroke (not that any stroke is good), and I had to take care of him. It was so stressful trying to work (and not being able to because his needs were so great). We went through all of our savings and retirement and now have nothing left to retire with. I'll be 70 this year and my husband is 68 and unable to work. Paid family leave would have made a huge difference.



**Erin Johnson, Swarthmore, PA** As a single mom, the devastating news that my 10 month old baby was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia was awful. Adding concerns about health insurance and income to my concerns about the well-being of my daughter added to the stress. Luckily, my employer offered paid family leave. While we are still in treatment 27 months later, having paid leave for those first 3 months meant I had a small financial cushion to offset the coming months of very trying treatment. As a single parent, I have had to rely on Medicaid, Food Stamps and Unemployment benefits to help me and my daughter to survive financially during this health crisis. Thankfully, I have a work history that will eventually enable me to earn money again, once my daughter's treatment concludes. Having some support from my last employer was crucial for the first phase of treatment for my only child. Thank you for what you are doing to highlight the various needs people have for paid family leave.

### **Parental Leave**

*Listed by constituents in subcommittee districts, then alphabetically by state*

Danny Davis (D-IL- Chicago), Chair

**Whitney Floersch, Chicago, IL** When I had my second child, my company, Vladimir Jones, did not offer any paid leave for employees. I was able to take advantage of 12 weeks of short-term disability which I was glad to have as I needed a c-section and had a slow recovery. However the day before I

was to return to work my boss called and told me I was going to be laid off the next day. I can't help but wonder if I would have been laid off if I had been in the office instead of home with my child for those post-birth weeks.

Gwen Moore (D-W- Milwaukee)

**Margaret Karpinen, Deforest, WI** Although I wanted a second child, I literally had to wait about 3 years to build up my sick time at my full-time job so that I could afford to stay home with a newborn. Even in waiting this long, I did not have enough sick time to cover 12 weeks and had to supplement with my vacation time. I'm now back at work, and for the entire year of 2019, I have less than two weeks to use for any sick time this year (which is often taken for my children) and for any vacation time. In addition, my husband has to put off a much-needed hip replacement surgery for another year because he used up his sick time to stay home with our son for 3 weeks. If paid family leave was an actual thing, it would relieve so much stress for families like mine. And, I am actually one of the lucky ones in this nation's current conditions -- so many mothers are only allowed to take 6 weeks off, or to beg to have even 2 weeks off. It is so unsupportive of mothers and new life. I can't stress enough how it feels morally wrong to have to leave your new baby after so little time. The United States is so far behind, it's incredibly sad.

**Kristine Asatryan, Tujunga, CA** I am a full time working mother of two incredible boys. I missed out on a lot of great firsts and life events due to not having paid family leave as I didn't qualify with the first two. I had to go back to work for financial reasons but was so extremely devastated. Now, pregnant with my third and due on March 17, all I can think about is how will I do this again. I do qualify for the 6 weeks paid time off which covers only 60% of my pay and that is not enough. Not enough money to cover my family's expenses and not enough time to bond and to be there for my family. This is such a difficult time instead of being joyous and worry free. This has to change as our children are our future and the way we start their first year or two makes them who they are. I demand better family leave as we mothers and fathers deserve that and our children deserve it even more.

**Lauren Butland, Tampa, FL** I am currently on maternity leave for a total of 3 months, unpaid. I go back March 18th. My baby will only be 12 weeks old. While many mothers have to go back sooner, this is still so young to be away from his mother. We will be apart for 10 hours a day, 5 days a week. My baby is exclusively breastfed. To avoid running the risk of having to use formula, I have to be under the stress of finding time in my busy work schedule 3 times a day. This is unrealistic. I implore you to make a policy for paid family leave so other mothers and babies don't have to endure what we will.





**Erin Richards, Saint Petersburg, FL** I'm a single mother by choice, expecting my son in about 2 weeks. I've been in my current position for almost 5 years, but they've used the fact that it is grant funded to keep me under a temporary agency. They changed temporary contracting companies last year and I even lost access to health insurance from work. My current coverage is COBRA from the previous agency. This has greatly increased the cost of my pregnancy. I don't get paid when I don't work, so I've been trying to save where I can. I've managed to get about 5 weeks pay set aside so I can hopefully take 6 weeks off after he is born. Luckily my mother is going to help out for a little while with childcare when I return to work, but that is only a short term reprieve. I'm so happy to finally be living my lifelong dream of motherhood, but the extra costs and uncertainty cast a long shadow. I've just turned 41 so I could not have delayed any longer, and honestly I'm still probably in better financial shape to do this than I have ever been. I wish I could just focus on him instead of constantly

running numbers trying to figure out how I can make this work.

**LaDonna Watts, Savannah, GA** I have a 10 month baby. When I discovered I was pregnant, my husband and I were not prepared. We were both in school at the time and I still had 3 semesters before I graduated. I also worked part-time as a historical actress downtown and part-time as a peer coach on campus. We were in the meat of prepping for our future, which I don't think will ever end. I refused to quit school and my husband fully supported my decision. For my graduating semester, my mother-in-law had to come from Africa so that I could continue to go to school and work. Without paid leave, I had no choice but to continue working 2 part-time jobs and go to school. I remember leaving school in between classes just to come and see my little boy. Financially, it is not easy at all. I can't afford to put him in daycare because essentially I'll be working only to fund daycare. This would be a major and necessary change.

**Naureen Ahmed, Carol Stream, IL** The first time I became a mother, I was working for a non-profit with no benefits, and only got 2 weeks time off, before I was expected to return to work. I did return to work, and I was in so much pain for the first month, and pumping milk every 2 hours for the next 12 months. I was beyond exhausted, to say the least. The second time I had a baby, I was working for another nonprofit with no maternity benefits, so I decided to quit in my last trimester. Was I unproductive? No! I started an at-home daycare so I could get some sort of income while I stayed home with my newborn baby. I ended up rejoining the corporate workforce when my baby was 2 months old. (Still pumping!) The third time I had a baby, I now had benefits, yay! I was back at work when my baby was 6 weeks old! She was SO GROWN UP! (Still pumping!) The fourth time I had a baby, I had benefits, but was able to negotiate a transitional return-to-work. 3 weeks in, I was working from home 2 days a week. 6 weeks in, I was in the office 2 days a week. 10 weeks in, I was in the office 3 days a week. And by 12 weeks, I

was back at work full time and still pumping! Oh, I forgot to mention, my newborn was in the ICU during this period, but I was still working. I don't want my own daughters to ever go through what I went through. America needs to mandate paid leave for new mothers.



**Kara Girsch, Peoria, IL** I am a teacher. I spend my entire life helping other people's children. When it comes to having my own, I feel completely guilty. With my first child, I took four weeks off because it was the end of the school year. I suffered from postpartum depression and had to have my gallbladder removed two weeks after giving birth. I received emails on a daily basis from my department head with a checklist of things to do while I was at home on leave without pay. Even though I was at home, I was still doing all the work. My second child brought much of the same. Because his birthday fell around Easter, I took my four weeks, but including break it was six. I cried every day at work until the end of the year because I felt guilty. We couldn't afford me to stay at home any longer. My husband was unemployed, and we all

know that no one goes into education for the money. I am lucky because my mom took care of my boys. My third child was a horrible experience. I switched schools in a failed attempt to make more money to cover for what my husband wasn't bringing in. The stress put me into contractions in November when my son wasn't due until March. I had to go on bed rest. Luckily, at my new school, I had family medical leave to cover bed rest. I did not have that same security for maternity leave. I took six weeks. I would love to stay home with my children so that I know they are developed enough to be ready for grandma to take care of them. Leaving them at a month and a half is too soon. I work hard to balance everything, but I feel a constant pressure from society to stretch myself thin to the point of endangering my mental health. Our children are the future and we are doing our future a disservice by not giving them the adequate parental attention they need to help them be the compassionate people this country needs to move forward. Please look to the examples set by the rest of the world so that modern mothers and fathers can worry about diapers instead of dollars. We need capitalism with compassion and we need it now.

**Ronetia Douglas, Randallstown, MD** I have been a Federal Employee for under 1 year. Since gaining employee I have learned we are expecting our 3rd child and my 2nd child was diagnosed with an umbilical hernia. He will need surgery to repair this hernia. I have used my allowed sick days for prenatal appointments and consultations for my 2nd child. I will not have much time left when my due date arrives in May. I have joined the leave bank, but the uncertainty of not receiving pay during my time out is something that I think about daily. I checked into short term disability plans, that would NOT sell policies to me because I am a federal employee (Aflac). How could this be the federal government? Women populate the world (creating future voters), but I guess we have to do all of this on our vacation time. Thanks for listening.

**Erin Schlicher, Onondaga, MI** Although I had a good full time job as a staff member at a major university, I did not have access to any paid family leave. When my husband and I decided to start a family, I had enough vacation time saved to give me at least six weeks of paid leave after the baby was born. However, I did not anticipate that my pregnancy would be a complicated one, and I had to be hospitalized for several weeks in my second trimester. During this time, I used up all of the paid sick and vacation time that I had accrued and I had to go on unpaid FMLA leave. When I finally gave birth, I didn't even have the full 12 weeks of FMLA leave left to use, even if I could afford to take it. I was forced to return to work five weeks after giving birth, which was the earliest my doctor would allow me to. These five weeks weren't even enough time for me to physically recover from the trauma of the delivery, and I did not get to fully enjoy being with my new baby, since I was worried about how I would be able to meet my financial obligations. I think it is sad and embarrassing that families in this country have to go through these types of experiences every day. Although I am not going to have any more children, this is an issue that is extremely important to me, and I can not support any candidate or politician who does not support paid family leave.

**Tiffany Leppo, Littleton, PA** My first daughter was born on a Monday. We were discharged on Wednesday evening, by Thursday evening I was back in the ER receiving a blood patch. My husband was back to work on Monday. No time to bond with our newborn, let alone help a new mom adjust. We then planned our finances when we understood we were only going to receive a portion of my pay for the first 5 weeks of my leave. Fathers need to be home too.



**Heidi Liivamagi, Pennsylvania, PA** I am a mother of two young children (2 yr old and 6 month old). The United States is the only developed country without official paid maternity leave. Postpartum care of mothers is laughable and only a very small percentage of mothers get to have any sort of maternity leave at all. I am considered lucky that my employer provided me with 12 weeks of (unpaid) maternity leave. Most families in this country cannot afford to be unpaid for 12 weeks - not even 2 weeks. And 12 weeks is not nearly enough for mothers and babies. Please look around in the world and familiarize yourself with parental leave policies of other developed countries. As an

example, Estonia provides new mothers 18 months fully paid maternity leave and almost 2 months of fully paid pregnancy leave (in the United States pregnant women are expected to work until the minute they go into labor). Babies need their mothers and mothers need their babies! It is against nature to put your newborn in daycare with strangers. I urge you to follow the example of other countries that value young families.

**Megan Moore, Dayton, OH** I have two children-one is 2 and the other 8 weeks. I went back to work with my oldest at 6 weeks; it was a slap in the face. She had a lot of trouble at daycare and I was still very much suffering from postpartum hormones. It was hard for me to focus at work for months. This time around I am taking 12 weeks with my second child. However, due to her being born early and spending time in the NICU I am taking most of that unpaid because my sick days were used for my



increased appointments and bed rest. With her stay in the NICU, we are getting new medical bills everyday as well as our student loans and other bills. As a young teacher neither time I had children I did not have much time saved up to take off. Teachers are Also expected to do much more work for their FMLA leave than other professions.,I planned entire units, took questions from my subs and co workers; I even know some teachers who go in to grade papers and answer parent emails. If maternity leave were more valued schools could use funds to find the best subs to support the children.

**Nora Gordon, Shaker Heights, OH** Because of our lack of maternity leave, I am negative 150 hours in the hole on sick leave after having two kids. I can't take any more sick days and have to save the few hours of annual leave I have for true emergencies. When my kids are sick, really sick, and all they want is mom, I can't stay home. When I'm sick, really sick, I go to work. And my coworkers inevitably catch what I've got. The lack of paid family leave is bad for everyone.

**Carrie Carpenter, Dandridge, TN** I had to go back to work 3 weeks after having an emergency c-section that left my newborn in the NICU for a month. When she finally came home she was on oxygen for a month. I could not afford to miss a day of work and went back so I could afford gas money to go to and from the hospital to be with her. No paid leave is unacceptable.



**Audrey Blute, Washington D.C.** When I went into labor at 33 weeks pregnant and delivered my son prematurely, my main worry was how I would manage to take enough time off to be with him while he grew and got strong enough to go to childcare. My company only offered one week of full pay, while my son was in the NICU for 3.5 weeks. We made the decision for me to take disability and then unpaid leave to allow me to stay home with our son until he was 4 months old. While we are fortunate that this was feasible financially for our family, this is NOT a reality for most families. If we were less fortunate we would have been caught between leaving our vulnerable son in childcare before he was physically ready or not being able to pay our bills.

**Catherine Swanson, Washington D.C.** I am a federal employee expecting my first child in October. After caring for my mother through cancer last year, I have less than three weeks of sick leave banked. Clearly, that is not enough time to recover from childbirth, let alone bond with a new infant. My husband and I are trying to determine how much unpaid leave I can afford to take before returning to work. Please help us out of this nightmare.

**Brenna Holzhauser, Madison, WI** I work for a small non-profit that does not fall under FMLA and does not offer paid leave. I'm having a baby this summer and am having to choose between my career, my family's income, what's best for the organization, and what's best for my baby. This is not a fair choice. The US is so far behind other countries in this area, and I wish families and children were not losing out to businesses, lobbyists and politics.

### **Personal Medical Leave**

*Listed alphabetically by state*



**Greta Truett, Phoenix, AZ** During the second trimester of my pregnancy with my now almost 2 year old son, I was diagnosed with cancer. I was lucky that it was caught early and only required surgery instead of chemotherapy or radiation. Because I am employed at a small business not subject to FMLA, I had to use the small amount of personal time off that I had left for the year to cover the unexpected emergency surgery and recovery time. After the new year, I then developed A C. difficile infection after surgery and had to struggle to work from home so that I could continue to earn money since my insurance deductible was so high and I was trying to save my PTO for the birth of my son later that spring. A C. difficile infection causes violent abdominal contractions every few hours and extreme pain/discomfort to use the bathroom. I was so terrified that I would go into premature labor. The stress of worrying about the life of my child was compounded by trying to continue working a demanding job. I then had to return to work after 8 weeks from having my son as that was the maximum the company would allow me to take for medical leave. I developed post-partum depression in part because my ability to breastfeed was impacted by going back so soon and being so stressed out. I am not surprised that our birth rate has been declining in this country given the lack of a consistent leave policy across businesses. We also need to realize that the increasing wave of aging Baby Boomers is going to start putting a strain on my generation as their children. Just as they took care of their Greatest Generation parents, we Gen X/early Millennials now will have more and more senior citizens needing assistance from their family members as they age. For a country where many claim to be pro-family, we have a lot of work to do to support families of any kind.

**Emily Hardesty, Glen Allen, VA** I just had surgery in December and was out on short term disability which was the biggest nightmare. The thought of having to go through that again in the (hopefully) near future for pregnancy is dreadful. What's pathetic is that I was approved for 8 weeks of short-term-disability leave for my hip surgery. But if I have a baby while on this short term disability plan, I'll only be eligible for 4 weeks of leave at 40% of my salary. Let's pass a bill to offer paid family medical leave for everyone! It is long overdue! Instead of \$5 billion for this ridiculous wall, let's put it towards paid family medical leave.

**Joy Rosenberry Chase, Madison, WI** In August of 2017, I went in for a simple outpatient procedure to remove an ovarian cyst. I was supposed to be back at work the next day. Instead, the cyst burst, leading to a life-threatening infection and 4 more surgeries, not to mention 7 emergency room visits. I haven't been able to work for over a year. Thankfully, my husband's work has paid family leave so he could rush me to the hospital when necessary and be there with me to make medical decisions when I couldn't. I was in the hospital a total of a month over the course of 6 months. With all the medical bills and my not being able to work, paid medical leave meant I could concentrate on getting better, not on whether we could feed our daughter or pay our rent.

### **Validators**

*Listed alphabetically by state*

**Pat Serio, Oberlin, OH** I am a Nurse Midwife who has delivered over 2000 babies before I retired two years ago. It is essential that new mothers have time off to establish breastfeeding. This usually takes between 6-8 weeks. Babies who are breastfed are healthier for their entire life. Less obesity, less diabetes, hypertension, fewer food allergies, less asthma, better brain development. These chronic health problems cost the US millions and millions, probably far more than a paid family leave would cost. These benefits would last a lifetime. Please be wise and allow people in the US to enjoy the support that

so many other modern societies offer: paid family leave.

**Danielle Pascetta, Havertown, PA** I am a pediatric occupational therapist in a school setting. I recently had a baby in October and was home with him for 3 months (all unpaid). The way my company works is I get paid monthly so I did not receive a paycheck from October - February. I had to rely on my husband and any gift cards that family and friends gave us to buy necessary items for the baby. I also owe about \$260,000 of student loan debt that I was unable to pay during my time off because whatever money I saved up prior to my leave was used for other bills. I was very stressed out during my time off and feel as though it affected the baby's ability to relax at times. Returning to work is already stressful for new moms but knowing I was backed up on so many bills made it even worse.



**Candice Quarles, Desoto, TX** I'm a Councilwoman in DeSoto, TX. I'm 37 years old and we have a 4 yr old. I'm currently fighting for Paid Family Leave for our city employees. It hurts my core that our firefighters for our city who put their own lives on the line and who are our first line medical professionals in our community cannot properly bond at home with their newborns because they do not have access to paid maternity and paternity leave. Its 2019, we can do something about this. It's time to support those who support us.